

## Hymnology

#488 “Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart (Slane) has long been popular among the congregations of other denominations and was included in the Ecumenical Hymn List. It appeared for the first time in an Episcopal hymnal in the present book. The text is a prayer from the Irish monastic tradition, “Rop tú mo bhoile, a Comdi cride.” It may be as ancient as the year 700, although one scholar gives a convincing argument for placing it in the Early Middle Irish period, ca. 1000. It is one of two examples in our hymnal of the Celtic lorica or breastplate, almost a sort of incantation to be recited for protection, arming oneself for physical or spiritual battle. (The other lorica is “St. Patrick’s Breastplate”, Hymn #370, that we sang on Trinity Sunday). A prose translation by Mary E. Byrne was published in 1905 in the journal *Ériu*; it was versified by Eleanor H. Hull and included in her *Poem-Book of the Gael* (London, 1912) in the form that we sing. The tune, of Irish folk origin, is named Slane after a hill about 10 miles from Tara hill in County Meath. It is on Slane hill, according to the account in the *Confessions of St. Patrick*, that the Irish saint defied the command of the pagan king Loegaire by lighting the Paschal fire on Easter eve. St. Patrick’s act was done in defiance of the king’s edict that no fire could be ignited before the royal fire was lit by the king’s hand on Tara hill. The royal fire was kindled to celebrate the pagan Spring festival and symbolized the return of light and change of seasons following the darkness of winter. The hymn tune Slane is a slightly altered version of the Irish folk melody originally set to the ballad text “With my love on the road.” Its first known publication is in Patrick W. Joyce’s *Old Irish Folk Music and Songs: A Collection of 842 Irish Airs and Songs hitherto Unpublished* (London and New York, 1909). The folk melody was adapted and couple with the text “Be thou my vision” by Leopold McC. L. Dix for the Irish *Church Hymnal* (Dublin, 1919).

*Wonder Love & Praise* 764 “Taste and see” contains both words and music by the same person. Dr. James Moore, an American composer living in Vienna, holds degrees in music from Virginia State University, Virginia Commonwealth University and the University of Cincinnati. During his years in Cincinnati, he taught at Mount St. Mary’s Seminary and came to know the Roman Catholic parish of St. Agnes. This piece was written for the congregation of St. Agnes to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their pastor, Fr. Paul Rehling. It neatly paraphrases much of Psalm 34 in its stanzas, using that Psalm’s best-known phrase as its refrain. Since its appearance in a small Catholic parish it has spread widely. Not only is it in *Wonder Love & Praise* but also *Lift Every Voice & Sing*. It was sung at the funeral of Cardinal Bernardin and for Pope John Paul’s visit to Central Park in New York City. Psalm 34 is the alternate psalm choice in the lectionary for today.

#594 “God of grace and God of glory” (Cym Rhondda) has a text by Harry Emerson Fosdick, written at his summer home in Boothbay Harbor. It was sung the following fall at the opening of the Riverside Church, New York City, on 5 October 1930. Fosdick, a preacher of international acclaim, conceived of the text being sung to the tune Regent Square, and it is reported that he was not happy about it being sung to other tunes. He wrote about “my hymn’s divorce from Regent Square and remarriage to Cwm Rhondda: The Methodists did it! And both here and abroad they are being followed.” This quote is from Dr. Fosdick’s autobiography, *The Living of These Days* (New York, 1956). The tune Cwm

Rhondda was composed by John Hughes for a Baptist *Cymanfa Gannu* (Singing Festival) in 1903, originally with the name Rhondda. Though sung to many different texts in Welsh, it is most often linked in English with “Guide me, O thou great Jehovah” (#690). Its inclusion in many mainline hymnbooks was resisted for many decades and it therefore circulated in pamphlet form. Today, its increasing inclusion in such books is partly due to a wider view of what a good hymn tune is and to the inevitability of bowing to popular appeal. It is seen by many as the typical Welsh hymn tune in its fervor and strong rhetoric, though it does not possess the other characteristics often associated with Welsh tunes of being in a minor key and gloomy. The name of the tune means “Rhondda Valley.”

#329 “Now my tongue, the mystery telling” (Pange lingua) uses the same tune as the historically important text upon which it is modeled, “Sing my tongue, the glorious battle,” that is sung on Good Friday. How exactly are the bread and wine of the Eucharist to be understood as the body and blood of Christ? This is the question that occupied the theologians of the eleventh century and later provided the impetus for the writing of this hymn. By the time the century ended, the doctrine of transubstantiation (the teaching that the outward appearance of the elements remain the same while the actual substance changes to body and blood) had established itself as the orthodox Roman Catholic interpretation of the Eucharistic elements. This is the origin of the Roman Catholic festival of Corpus Christi. The texts associated with Corpus Christi were ascribed to St. Thomas Aquinas by his confessor, Ptolemy of Lucca. The theology and literary quality of the texts support this attribution; however, several recent studies of the various forms of the early Corpus Christi Offices suggest that at least parts of those attributed to St. Thomas actually existed before his time. There is little question that St. Thomas played some part in the development of the Mass and Offices for Corpus Christi, but whether he wrote the hymns is still very much an open question. The music originated in France and became popular about the year 1100.

#420 “When in our music God is glorified” (Engelberg) has a text written by Fred Pratt Green in 1972 at the request of John Wilson, who asked for new words for Charles Villiers Stanford’s festive tune Engelberg. That tune had been written in 1904 for use with the words “For all the saints,” but it was eclipsed almost immediately by Ralph Vaughan Williams’s *Sine Nomine* (#287). The hymn is based loosely on Psalm 150, Mark 14: 26, and Matthew 26: 30. It was originally entitled “Let the People Sing!” and the first published form of the opening line was “When in man’s music, God is glorified.” History suggests that it is very difficult to write a real hymn on the subject of congregational music making. Usually there is insufficient weight and development to support the effusiveness that this theme seems to generate. Here, however, we have an honest hymn of substance and scope that is never self-congratulatory or platitudinous.

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